NSC BRIEFING 7 August 1956

SUEZ FACTS & FIGURES

1. Physical: 103 miles long, no locks. 60 miles of length are dredged through lakes and mud-flats, 43 miles cut through land. Ships with 34-foot draft are the largest that can use the canal at present, and navigation for these is difficult because the channel is narrow and shallow. Sidings (map) have been constructed as a solution to the narrowness of the canal's channel, but the shallowness means that some of today's large super-tankers are unable to use the canal when fully loaded (maximum is 30,000 tons of crude oil, as opposed to a super-tanker's 45,000 ton capacity). Silting of the channel and occasional collapse of embankments require continuous dredging and embankment maintenance. Recently, the canal company has considered undertaking a major effort to widen and deepen the channel.

2. Traffic: Although total ship movements (14,666 transits in '55) are about equally northbound and southbound, northbound movements account for some 80% (or 87 of a total 107.5 million cargo tons) of the cargo traffic through the canal. Some two-thirds of the ships using the canal are tankers, and over 75% of the northbound cargo in '55 (or 67 million tons) was petroleum. Origins and destinations of this oil were as follows:

TABLE
(millions of tons)

FROM	TONS	TO	TONS
Kuwait	42.5	UK	20.5
Saudi Arabia	9.7	France	12.0
Iran	8.6	USA	8.4
Iraq	4.0	Italy	7.2
Qatar	2.9	Holland	7.2
Bahrein	2.0	Belgium	1.9
Malaya & Indonesia	[illegible]	Sweden	1.[illegible]
(other)	1.0		
	67.9		67.9

7. Major users of the canal rank in this order:

	Tonnage	Percent of use
United Kingdom	22.9 million	20%
Norway	15.6	13
Liberia*	14.0	12
France	10.6	9
Italy	9.0	8
Panama*	8.4	7
Netherlands	4.8	4
Sweden	3.8	3
USA	3.2	2.7

*NOTE: Because a number of Liberian- and Panamanian-registered vessels are so-called "foreign flag American affiliates", use of the canal by US interests ranks second to the UK.

8. Soviet Bloc use of the canal is less than 1½ of total use (1.[illegible] million tons) but the Bloc makes noteworthy use of the canal for southbound petroleum shipments, both to Egypt (at Suez) and the Communist Far East (800,000 tons in '58 and 520,00 tons in the first half of '60).

9. Major cargo items, other than oil, include the following:

Northbound:	minerals and metals	(3.8 million tons)
	grains	(2.4 " ")
	vegetable oils	(2.3 " ")
	textiles	(1.7 " ")
	rubber	(1.3 " ")
	sugar	(1.0 " ")
Southbound:	semi-finished metals	(3.7 million tons)
	cement	(2.7 " ")
	fertilizer	(2.4 " ")
	machinery	(1.6 " ")
	sugar	(1.0 " ")
	lumber & paper	(0.5 " ")

3. Ownership and Construction Costs: The Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez was originally capitalized in 1858, on the basis of 400,000 shares @500 gold francs per share. Private French subscribers purchased 200,000 shares and the Khedive of Egypt granted the land in exchange for 96,000 shares (later, the Ottoman Empire purchased [illegible]

4. The Canal's construction cost $80 million. If the value of the land grant ($12 million) and Ottoman-held shares ($16 million) are added to the Egyptian indemnity ($21 million) paid the company in 1869, it may be said that Egypt bore 70% of this construction cost.

5. Disraeli's 1875 coup involved the purchase of the Khedive's 76,000 shares, plus others, for a total UK holding of 176,000 shares (or over 40%). A stock split later brought the outstanding total to 800,000 (capital and ordinary), with a market value (26 July '56) of some $180 million.

6. Operations: The canal was formally opened in 1869 and, under the terms of the concessions, was to remain under control of the Company until 17 Nov '68 (99-year lease) when it would revert to the Egyptian Government. Company personnel totals some 4,110, of which 2,400 Egyptians and 800 "others" make up the labor force, and 910 (including 382 Egyptians, 211 French and 317 "others") make up the technical and administrative staff.

7. The 205 canal pilots are included in this technical staff (all vessels over 800 tons must use a pilot). Of these, 61 are UK nationals, 53 French, 40 Egyptian, and the remaining 51 of various nationalities.

8. In Aug '49, the Company entered an agreement to increase the number of Egyptians in its employ. Thereafter, for every five vacancies in the technical staff, four were to be filled by Egyptians; for every 10 in the administrative staff, 9; for every two pilot vacancies, one.

c. Revenue: Canal tolls are calculated on a ship's "net register tonnage" as derived by the Company's own formula (some 30% higher than the standard net tonnage), and a differential is maintained between loaded and ballasted ships (80¢ per ton on loaded ships, 43¢ on empty ones). This toll-rate was last adjusted in mid-July '54 and is an 5% reduction of the previous toll.

d. 1955 receipts totalled $99 million. After expenses of $61 million ($29 million for operations, and $32 million for improvements, pensions, amortization, etc.), the net profit amounted to $38 million. $7 million of this went to Egypt (under terms of a '49 agreement guaranteeing Egypt 7% of gross profits annually and not less than $1 million), and the remaining $31 million was distributed to stockholders (about $20 a share).

d. Future Problems: Assuming continued Egyptian operation of the canal, one major question is whether Egyptian maintenance will permit continued operations without a loss in efficiency.

e. Another question is to what extent the Egyptians could milk canal users by raising tolls. In this connection, it is calculated that a 40% increase in rates could bring the annual net profit to around $100 million. On voyages from the Persian Gulf to European ports, use of the canal can reduce costs by nearly 50%, as this table shows (in dollars per cargo ton for US T-2 tanker operations, costing $2,500 per day):

ROUTE	PERSIAN GULF TO:		
	ITALY	UK	
Round trip via Suez:	$ 7.37(36 days)	$ 9.95 (42 days)	$11.65(50)
Round trip via Cape:	$14.42(67 days)	$14.65 (68 days)	$15.39(71)
Suez saving:	$ 7.05	$ 4.70	$ 3.74

8. Thus, for voyages ex-Persian Gulf ports to Europe, the toll rate could be hiked as much as 300% before use of the canal would be priced out of the market. This is, however, an extreme example and furthermore is based on US ship-operating costs, which are substantially higher than those of foreign flags. Thus, in general, a safer judgment is that a 100% increase in tolls would still permit advantageous use of the canal in voyages between Europe and the area east of Suez and north of the equator. For voyages extending south of the equator, however, such a toll increase would give the canal little, if any, advantage, over the Cape route.